



July 11, 2019

*VIA email:* DHSSecretary@hq.dhs.gov

Acting Secretary Kevin McAleenan  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Re: State of Emergency in the Gulf Coast

Dear Acting Secretary McAleenan:

We write to ask that the Department of Homeland Security enact and widely publicize policies to protect public safety as the Louisiana and Gulf Coast region prepare for the tropical storm system that is projected to develop into Hurricane Barry. Specifically, we request that DHS immediately issue a public statement that it will not conduct immigration enforcement activities in all areas that have declared a state of emergency, and in areas where residents are evacuating to, sheltering, and later evacuees will be returning to their homes. This includes at least the entire Gulf Coast region under the responsibility of the New Orleans ICE Field Office—Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee. This is needed to show that DHS will prioritize rescue and relief efforts over immigration enforcement.

On July 10, Governor John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency for the State of Louisiana, and Mayor Cantrell issued a proclamation declaring a state of emergency for the City of New Orleans. These declarations were made because of predictions of a Category 1 Hurricane making landfall in Louisiana, with thunderstorms and hurricane-force winds likely to endanger life, injury, and property in the area. The Gulf Coast region is particularly at risk because of the danger of storm surge on the Mississippi River, which already measured at 16 feet at the Carrollton gauge on July 10 before the Barry system entered the area. Hurricane Barry may create an unprecedented situation in the New Orleans region: a cyclone-driven storm surge up a river already running at its highest point since 1950. This could create a surge higher even than Hurricane Katrina. Plaquemines Parish President Kirk Lepine has issued a mandatory evacuation order and other parishes are contemplating calling for evacuations.

Emergency protection from hurricanes and natural disasters is a fundamental human right, and evacuation should never lead to deportation. But in this environment, immigrant residents and their families will fear risking deportation from evacuation, shelters, and all emergency aid efforts unless DHS makes specific public reassurances that immigration enforcement is suspended. Such assurances are critical to the ongoing safety of all



Gulf Coast residents during this humanitarian crisis and would be consistent with DHS's position that priorities in any emergency are life-saving and life-sustaining activities, preventing the loss of property to the extent possible, and assisting with a speedy recovery of the affected region.

DHS attempted to give assurances during Hurricane Florence when it issued a statement on September 14 of last year that "there will be no immigration enforcement initiatives associated with evacuations or sheltering related to Florence, except in the event of a serious public safety threat." But DHS directives in these moments should be clear and unequivocal that all immigration enforcement in a humanitarian disaster relief area is suspended while a state of emergency has been declared and while relief efforts of evacuations, sheltering, and return of evacuees to their homes are on-going.

Lives are at stake as communities in the Gulf Coast prepare for a storm that could be devastating. It is essential that DHS issue a clear directive suspending immigration enforcement in the Gulf Coast region—the area of the New Orleans Field Office—so that no one fears fleeing the path of the storm. Thank you for your immediate attention to this important issue.

Please contact me as soon as possible at 504-264-4219 to discuss this urgent issue.

Signed,

Ursula Price  
Executive Director  
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice

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